

Assessing the Turkish Model as a Guide to the Emerging Democracies in the Middle East

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Abstract

Since the beginning of the Arab Spring, the so-called 'Turkish model' has become a key ingredient of the discourse of democratization in the Middle East. Despite the widespread interest, however, there is a great sense of confusion caused by the subjective use and misinterpretation of the model. The study will point to the weaknesses of the two conventional understandings of the Turkish model and offer a new approach. The study will acknowledge various socio-economic, cultural and political differences between Turkey and Middle Eastern societies and the fact that the full application of the model may not be possible, however, the article will conclude that despite these differences, the Turkish model has a lot to offer in terms of guidance in areas such as the state-religion relations, the role of military, economic development and democracy building.

Keywords: Turkish Model, Arab Spring, Modernization, Post-Revolutionary Middle East, Economic Development, Democratization.

Ortadoğu'da Oluşmakta Olan Demokrasiler Açısından Türk Modelinin Bir Kılavuz Olarak Değerlendirilmesi

Özet

Türk Modeli, Arab Baharı'nın başlangıcından itibaren, Ortadoğu'da demokrasi üzerine yapılan akademik tartışmalar ve söylemlerin ayrılmaz bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Konuya yüksek bir ilgi olmasına rağmen, 'modelin' öznel kullanımı ve yanlış yorumlanması büyük bir anlam karmaşası ve yanlış algılamalara yol açmıştır. Bu çalışma, Türk Modeli hakkındaki alışlagelmiş iki temel yaklaşımın zayıf yanlarını vurgulayacak ve konuya yeni bir bakış açısı önerecektir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye ve Ortadoğu toplumları arasındaki çeşitli sosyo-ekonomik, kültürel ve siyasi farklılıkları ve bu modelin tümüyle uygulanmasının mümkün olamayacağı gerçeğini göz önünde bulunduracaktır; fakat bütün bu farklılıklara

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rağmen, Türk modelinin din-devlet ilişkileri, ordunun rolü, ekonomik gelişme ve demokrasinin inşası konularında bu toplumlara kılavuzluk edebileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Türk Modeli, Arap Baharı, Modernleşme, Devrim-Sonrası Ortadoğu, Ekonomik Gelişme, Demokratikleşme.

اوغوزهان كوكسال

تقييم النموذج التركي من خلال الديمقراطيات الناشئة في الشرق الاوسط

مخلص

النموذج التركي: منذ بداية الربيع العربي، أصبحت الديمقراطية في الشرق الاوسط جزءا لا يتجزء من المناقشات والحوارات الاكاديمية. على الرغم من اهمية الموضوع فان التفسير الخاطي وسوء الاستعمال لذاتية النموذج ادى الى تفسيرها بشكل غير صحيح. في هذه الدراسة يتم تسليط الضوء على نقاط الضعف الاساسية التقليدية للنموذج التركي، وتأكيد على ايجاد منظور جديد للموضوع. تبين هذه الدراسة الى صعوبة التطبيق النموذج التركي بكامله على الدول الشرق الاوسط وذلك لوجود الفروقات عدة بين المجتمع التركي والمجتمعات الشرق الاوسط من الناحية الاقتصادية والاجتماعية والثقافية والسياسية. وعلى الرغم من وجود كل هذه الاختلافات، سوف يكون النموذج التركي دليلا تعتمد مجتمعات هذه دول من حيث علاقة الدين والدولة ودور الجيش والتطور الاقتصادي والبناء الديمقراطي.

Introduction

The issue of 'modernization', which refers to the increasing political and economic supremacy of Europe *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world and the reaction of non-Western societies by making reforms to shorten the gap, emerged in the 18th century. At that time, the whole Middle East was under direct or indirect control of a single Muslim state, the Ottoman Empire. By the 18th century, however, the Ottoman armies had proved incapable of defeating even much smaller sized European forces due to the technological gap. Soon after, the more fundamental differences between the Ottoman state and its European counterparts were revealed as the Western manufactured products began to fill the Middle Eastern markets in the 19th century. The modernization

has continued to be the main problem of Middle Eastern societies long after the Ottoman Empire collapsed and modern nation-states were founded in the region.

Today, Turkey stands as the most ‘modernized’ Muslim country in the Middle East in regards to political and socio-economic development as the nation has achieved a relatively high level of working democracy and economic prosperity. Since the first half of the 20th century, even though Turkey has inspired modernization to many Muslim societies such as Egypt, no nation has completely adopted the Turkish way. The modernization of the Turkish Republic was led by the Kemalist elite and its final aim was to make the Turkish nation a Western society, undistinguishable from Italians or the Greek¹. The Kemalist-led Turkish modernization, with its strong emphasis on cultural Westernization and radical secularism, has been difficult to emulate by conservative Muslim nations. In the last three decades however, a dramatic shift has occurred within the Turkish modernization. As the state had come to terms with the rising power of Islam and an intensifying democratization process has begun since the 1980s, which have also coincided with a wave of economic liberalization followed by a miraculous economic growth, a new ‘Turkish model’ has emerged. The Turkish model with its combination of democracy and economic prosperity, offers a ‘third way’ to the Middle Eastern nations which have been squeezed between authoritarianism and radical Islamism so far.

The ongoing uprisings in the Middle East, the so-called ‘Arab Spring’, has intensified the debates over the Turkish model of modernization as the awakened societies in post-revolutionary countries such as Tunisia and Egypt have begun to look for a direction for their future². At this point, it has become necessary to discuss the applicability of the Turkish model for the Middle Eastern societies. Since the beginning of the Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt, the so-called Turkish model has become a key ingredient of the democratization in the Middle East discourse. The popularity of the topic has extended beyond the academic circles as numerous newspapers and non-academic journals published views on the Turkish model and the future of the emerging Arab democracies, however the widespread interest for the topic has

1 Meliha Benli Altunisik and Özlem Tür, *Turkey: Challenges of Continuity and Change*. (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), p. XV.

2 *The Economist* ‘Light, dark and muddle’, 25 June 2011, p. 62-64.

not led to a genuine search to comprehend the meaning and implications of the Turkish model but rather to an array of highly subjective and often misinformed articles published almost daily in the media.

In a newspaper article, a distinguished scholar of the field complained about how the 'Turkish model' is used by different groups to serve their political agendas³. There is a great sense of confusion caused by the subjective use and misinterpretation of the model. The first part of the paper aims to fill this gap with an objective analysis of the model, pointing to the successes and failures of Turkish modernization. In the second part, the applicability of the Turkish model for the Middle Eastern societies will be assessed and its potential lessons discussed. At this point, it is necessary to begin the analysis by discussing what the Turkish model really is. After an analysis of the ongoing debate, this paper will offer a clear understanding of the Turkish model. Only then, we can begin to discuss whether the model can be applied to the emerging democracies in the Middle East and what lessons it holds. It is hoped that this paper will dispense the shadows of doubt and confusion surrounding the topic.

Within the current discourse, there are two distinct understanding of the Turkish model, one that refers to Turkey's particular secularist and state-imposed modernization experience before the AKP's electoral victory in 2002 and the other emphasizing the post-2002 period rule of the AKP as a liberal and 'Muslim democratic' model. This paper will point to the weaknesses of these two conventional understanding of the Turkish model and offer a new definition that synthesizes the characteristics of both arguments into a more coherent approach. It must be noted that the attractiveness of the Turkish model for Middle Eastern societies is mainly based on its unique blend of democracy and political Islam, a phenomenon that has only emerged in the last decade; however focusing solely on the AKP and the last decade would be to over-simplify the complex nature of the Turkish model. This paper argues that the Turkish model is the consequence of a century long modernization experience that should be understood with all its aspects, covering both its radical secular background and the contemporary moderate Islamic rule of the AKP as this co-existence

3 Meliha Benli Altunisik) 'What is missing in the "Turkish Model" debate?', 23 June 2011, *Hürriyet Daily News* [Online]. Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=what-is-missing-in-the-8216turkish-model8217-debate-2011-06-23> (Accessed: 2 August 2011).

of political Islam, democracy and secularism in Turkey could not have occurred without the secularist past of the country and the long interaction of Turkish Islamists with the secular state establishment that has led to the moderation and transformation of their ideology towards a more democratic position.

The second part of the paper will focus on the applicability of the model for the post-revolutionary Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Tunisia and analyze how the Turkish model can help these societies in the coming years. The old authoritarian regimes have been overthrown but the crisis continues as these countries struggle to cope with issues such as the state-religion relations, economic reforms and democratization. The Turkish model offers useful insights on these issues with its six decades-long experience of democratization, successful liberalization of economy and integration into the global market and democratization reforms. The various socio-economic, cultural and political differences between Turkey and these societies and the fact that the full application of the model may not be possible will be acknowledged, however the paper will conclude that despite these differences, the Turkish model has a lot to offer in terms of guidance.

What Is the Turkish Model?

The debates over the Turkish model is so ambiguous and confusing that even the term ‘Turkish model’ has been the subject of heated discussions. Turkey is not willing to intervene in the domestic affairs of the Middle Eastern states and most observers are wary of using the term ‘Turkish model’⁴. Thus some observers prefer to use terms like ‘inspiration’, ‘companion’, or ‘guide’. The debate over the term should not be a crucial part of the discourse. This paper will use the term ‘Turkish model’ to describe the Turkish modernization experience as it is the most popular choice. Yet the debate over the contents and meaning of the model has been even more divisive and the paper will focus on that aspect.

Although there are many different interpretations and analyses, it is possible to roughly categorize the different perceptions of the Turkish

4 Mehmet Yegin ‘Turkey as a “Companion” not a “Model” to the Middle East’, 28 February 2011, USAK Center For American Studies [Online]. Available at: <http://www.usak.org.tr/EN/makale.asp?id=1965> (Accessed: 17 April 2012).

model to several distinct groups which will enable us to better examine the distinct arguments of each. A leading expert of the subject, Altunisik⁵ refers to two different understanding of the Turkish model, one that emphasizes the Turkish model as an example of the compatibility of Islam and democracy and the other that attributes the moderation of Turkish Islam and the success of Turkish modernization on Turkey's long democratic experience and state imposed secularism. Altunisik's categorization of the discourse is accurate but needs revision in light of the Arab Spring. For the purpose of this paper, in addition to the two groups mentioned by Altunisik, the young Arab revolutionaries will be referred as a third different group that perceivethe Turkish model as a guide to liberal, democratic and prosperous life in the Middle East.

The first group interprets the Turkish model as a 'centrally controlled modernization process under military tutelage'. Allegedly the supporters of this vision are the Middle Eastern secular elites, elements of the *ancienregime* in the post-revolutionary countries like Tunisia and Egypt and the Western world⁶. The main rationale of this group's understanding of the model is that the Middle Eastern peoples are not ready for democracy and the modernization process should be shaped by educated elites, which in this case is the military, to serve the people's interest in the long term. It must be noted that the Turkish modernization experience clearly offers justification for this argument as starting from the early 19th century until the first multi-party elections and transition to democracy in 1950, Turkish modernization was directed by state bureaucracy and military leaders like Kemal Ataturk and Ismet Inonu. Stone notes that Turkey did have authoritarian modernization for a long time before the democratization process which has only accelerated in the 1990s and 2000s when it was heavily supported by rapid economic growth⁷.

The supporters of the authoritarian version of Turkish model are clearly concerned about the possibility of Islamist take-over after democratic elections and propose the application of this model to prevent such an

5 Meliha Benli Altunisik, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey's Soft Power in the Middle East', *Insight Turkey*, Vol.10, No.2, 2008, p. 45.

6 Burhanettin Duran and NuhYilmaz 'Whose model? Which Turkey?', February 8 2011, Foreign Policy [Online]. Available at: http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/08/whose_model_which_turkey (Accessed: 16 January 2012).

7 Norman Stone 'This Spring Won't Breed Any More Turkeys', 5 April 2011, *The Times* (UK) [Online]. Available at: <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article2972840.ece>

outcome, however in regards to the post-revolutionary environment and political culture of countries such as Tunisia and Egypt where the pro-revolutionary masses continue to supervise the executive powers of the governments from the streets and by organizing regular demonstrations to encourage the rapid transition to full democracy, the application of such a model that explicitly defends the military tutelage and elite rule would be extremely difficult. Despite the Egyptian military's continuing rule, it can be said that such a model is obsolete under the new political conditions of the day and the only way to put this vision into practise is to impose it on an unwilling population through coercion which would certainly lead to the establishment of a new authoritarian regime. Such an outcome is completely opposite to what the Arab Spring achieved and very similar to the pre-revolutionary regime of autocrats like Ben Ali or Mubarak which had failed to achieve modernization. It is noteworthy to point that the old Turkish modernization style, particularly before 2002, is in many ways similar to the experience of Middle Eastern societies. The so-called Kemalist modernization defined as a state-imposed, elitist, radical secularist and military supervised type of modernization seems to be defunct even in modern Turkey and it would be unrealistic for Egypt and Tunisia, where Islamist parties have won majority in the parliaments, to implement a new wave of radically secularist, military-autocratic system⁸.

The second group interprets the Turkish model as an example of a moderate Islamic party co-existing with secular parties within a secular and democratic state structure. This understanding of the Turkish model puts emphasis on the importance of the ruling AKP (Justice and Development Party) on Turkish modernization to such extent that the Turkish model becomes synonymous with the 'AKP model'⁹. Dede's article¹⁰, a prime example of this group, suggests that the Turkish model is deeply connected to Turkey's rapid democratization process which has started with the electoral victory of the AKP in 2002. The AKP has continued to rule the country, even after three successive electoral victories, without attempting to implement *Shari'a* law or bring about a total state-imposed Islamic transformation of the society despite the suspicions of its rivals and a significant portion of the people. Despite

8 Alper Y. Dede "The Arab Uprisings: Debating the "Turkish Model" ,*Insight Turkey*, Vol.13, No.2, 2011, p. 25.

9 Dietrich Jung, "“After the Spring”: Is Turkey a Model for Arab States?", November 2011, Syddansk Universitet: Center for Mellemoststudier.

10 Alper Y. Dede, "The Arab Uprisings: Debating the "Turkish Model"", p. 23-32.

the belief of secular opposition that the AKP was merely exercising *taqiyyah* meaning in this case, to pretend to uphold democracy until it gained enough power to eliminate the secular state structure, the AKP has managed to pass several democratization packages and put them into practise¹¹.

The AKP is claimed to be a 'role model' for the *Ikhwan* and other Islamic or conservative political movements in the region¹². The arguments of this group imply a clear *a priori* belief, namely the expected rise of Islamic movements in the emergent Middle Eastern democracies. For decades, these movements have been suppressed and forcefully kept out of politics by the secular authoritarian elites through the use of a variety of ways, from legal barriers and electoral manipulations to direct repression by imprisonment or worse. Today, the results of the first 'free' elections in post-revolutionary Tunisia and Egypt have confirmed these deep-rooted beliefs as Islamist/conservative movements emerged as the victors with most seats in the new parliaments. This phenomenon is indeed similar to the experience of Islamists in Turkey. The Turkish Islamists have experienced a series of different reactions by the other parties and the establishment elite as initially, they were merely ignored in the 1970s and 1980s but as their power increased over the years, the Islamists came under direct attack by the state establishment as seen in the so-called 'post-modern' coup against the RP (Welfare Party) government in 1997. All these measures only strengthened the resolve of the Islamists leaders and failed to prevent the AKP to achieve and sustain its electoral victories. Following the multi-party elections after the Arab Spring, Islamist parties like Nahda in Tunisia and Freedom and Justice in Egypt are expected to rule these countries in the coming years. In this context, the understanding of the Turkish model as an example of political Islam's coexistence with democracy is highly relevant to the post-revolutionary countries in the Middle East. It is clear that the Middle Eastern Islamist parties can learn much from the AKP's particular experience and the transformation of political Islam in Turkey.

The main weakness within the arguments of the second group is rooted in the over-emphasis put on the post-2002 era under the AKP

11 Gamze Cavdar, 'Islamist "New Thinking" in Turkey: A Model for Political Learning?', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol.121, No.3, Fall 2006, p. 477-497.

12 Alper Y. Dede, 'The Arab Uprisings: Debating the "Turkish Model"', p. 23-32.

government. The proponents of this group tend to overlook the two-centuries of Turkish modernization and only focus on the last decade. Indeed thinkers like Dede¹³ seems to believe that the Turkish model has not emerged due to the country's background of 'authoritarian secularism' but rather due to its recent economic and diplomatic successes under the AKP administration. Nafaa¹⁴ is another observer who perceives the Turkish model only as the 'AKP model', overlooking the long and crucial pre-2002 phase of Turkish experience that formed the suitable conditions which in turn gave rise to the Turkish model in the last decade. These analyses fail to accurately describe the Turkish model by portraying the pre-2002 years as full of crises and the last decade as a 'miraculous golden age' during which the AKP has allegedly managed to solve all the various problems of the country such as identity, democracy and development. This paper argues that this specific interpretation of the Turkish model is misleading as the crucial background of Turkish modernization, namely the strong secular tradition of the country is disregarded. It can be argued that the AKP and the peaceful coexistence of political Islam with democracy could not have existed without the secular historical background¹⁵. In fact, most of the economic and political reforms that the AKP has been given credit for were actually initiated by previous governments¹⁶. It can be argued that the current economic success of Turkey is the direct result of the adoption of liberal economy and radical economic reforms implemented by Prime Minister Turgut Özal in the 1980s. It is also crucial to note that some of the democratization reforms were initiated by the previous coalition government of Ecevit in order to ease Turkey's accession into the European Union. In light of this, it can be argued that the AKP has merely continued these reforms.

Another major pillar of the second group's understanding of the model is that the Turkish political development can be perceived in terms of 'pre' and 'post' AKP eras as allegedly these periods reflect different

13 Ibid.

14 Hasan Nafaa 'The "Turkish Model" in the Mirror of the Arab Spring', in *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy From a Transatlantic Perspective*, Mediteranean Paper Series, The German Marshall Fund of the United States (Translated from Arabic by GhadaDiab), 2011, p. 37-44.

15 Kadri Gursel 'Who Really Wants "Muslim Democracy"?', *Turkish Political Quarterly*, Vol.10, No.1, Spring 2011, p. 93.

16 Dietrich Jung, "'After the Spring": Is Turkey a Model for Arab States", p. 3.

types of modernization¹⁷. The period prior to the AKP's victory in 2002 is portrayed as 'modernization from above under military guardianship' and the post-2002 period is presented as 'democratization from below through deconstruction of military guardianship' according to Atasoy¹⁸. Arguably, the first description is true to a large extent but the second requires scrutiny and more elaborate examination rather than being pictured in an oversimplified 'black and white' dichotomy.

Clearly, 'democratization from below', by definition, requires a proactive and willing population united in some form for achieving some objective which in this case can be seen as 'establishing advanced democracy' in Turkey. A detailed look at Turkey does not reflect this image as there have not been any social movements, effective demonstrations or a significant rise in the power and influence of pro-democratic non-governmental organizations over the decision-making of the AKP government. Ironically the only significant series of demonstrations during the AKP rule were organized by a number of NGOs under the title of 'Republican demonstrations' in 2007 to protest the AKP attempt to elect the foreign minister Abdullah Gul as president, which was seen as a violation of secularism as Gul's wife wears headscarf. The government's reaction to the only significant popular protest in the last decade was illuminating. The Prime Minister Erdogan used the term 'forced brigades' to define hundreds of thousands of Kemalist Turks, mostly urban women, children and young people¹⁹. Later on, the main organizers of the demonstrations, have been arrested under allegations of attempting to overthrow the republic by being members of a 'united terrorist organization' called *Ergenekon* which has been comprised of people with highly different political convictions, among them Kemalists, ultra-nationalists, Kurdish separatists, communists, radical socialists and radical Islamists. Considering the AKP reaction to the only noteworthy demonstration in the last decade and their habit of unilaterally passing reforms and laws in the parliament using their majority, it is right to question to what extent the political developments in the last decade could be considered as 'democratization from below'.

17 See Seymen Atasoy, 'The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?', *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XVIII, No.3, Fall 2011, p. 86-100 and Hasan Nafaa, 'The "Turkish Model" in the Mirror of the Arab Spring', in *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy From a Transatlantic Perspective*, Mediteranean Paper Series, The German Marshall Fund of the United States (Translated from Arabic by Ghada Diab), 2011, p. 37-44.

18 Seymen Atasoy, 'The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?', p. 86-100

19 *NTV-MSNBC* 'Erdoğan: Mitingekatılanlarbindirilmişti', 17 April 2007, [Online]. Available at: <http://arsiv.ntvmsnbc.com/news/405722.asp> (Accessed: 22 April 2012).

As shown above, the artificial division of Turkish modernization experience would be misleading as the post-2002 era is the continuation of the century-long experience of the pre-2002 era. Perhaps a better understanding of the Turkish model can be achieved by acknowledging that actually there are ‘two models’ within the Turkish modernization, one referring to the particular success of the Turkish Islamic movement to moderate and adopt to the democratic framework, and the other regarding to Turkey’s long struggle for economic development and democratization²⁰. The AKP is unique as an Islamist party because it has managed to re-shape Islamic politics by combining Islamic sensitivity to social values with respect to the characteristics of the modern state such as secularism, democracy and economic liberalism.

It is clear that the arguments of both main groups have significant weaknesses and a more balanced approach is needed to describe the Turkish model. This paper attempts to reconcile the two distinct variations of Turkish model and offer a synthesised version which would better fit the demands and needs of the Arab revolutionaries as a model. In the analysis of the Turkish model, both periods, the pre-2002 and post-2002, should be taken into account as both have been highly influential in the making of the Turkish model despite the fact that it has emerged a popular phenomenon only in the last decade.

The third group is the young generation of revolutionaries that have been influenced by the liberal social life and economic prosperity in Turkey. In recent years Turkey’s influence has spread to the region via cultural exchange as many Arabs have chosen Turkey as their main tourism destination in addition to the interest shown to Turkish TV series, movies and products²¹. In this regard, the AKP administration’s visa free policy towards the Arab countries has made a significant contribution²². As people and ideas have begun to move freely through conferences, student exchange programmes and collaboration between NGOs, Turkey’s ‘liberal influence’ has become highly effective in the minds of the local observers, resembling the earlier and ongoing role of Turkish interaction with European societies in shaping Turkish

20 Emad Y. Kaddorah ‘The Turkish Model: Acceptability and Apprehension’ *Insight Turkey*, Vol.12, No.4, 2010, p. 114.

21 *Haberturk* ‘Araplar’ınTürkiyesevgisineredengeliyor?’, 22 April 2012 [Online]. Available at: <http://ekonomi.haberturk.com/turizm/haber/736132-araplarin-turkiye-sevgisi-nereden-geliyor> (Accessed: 23 May 2012).

22 Kemal Kirisci ‘Turkey’s “Demonstrative Effect” and the Transformation of the Middle East’, *Insight Turkey*, Vol.13, No.2, 2011 p. 44.

modernization experience. It is clear that the young generation which has led the Arab Spring would not be inspired by a political model based on military tutelage²³. Their ongoing influence in the streets will be crucial in shaping the political economy of these countries in the coming years. To this group, the major importance of the Turkish model is its demonstration of the failures of authoritarian state-imposed secularism and intolerant radical Islam²⁴. To many, the Arab Spring signals the transition to a 'post-ideological era' where moderate Islam, modernism, liberal economy and democracy can co-exist in a pluralistic environment. As argued above in the analysis of the discourse of two main groups, only a balanced approach which will examine both the historical Turkish modernization experience before the AKP victory in 2002 and an objective look at the AKP rule of the last decade can reveal the true nature of the Turkish model. Only then can we start discussing the application of the Turkish model to the Middle Eastern societies.

As clearly noted by Ulgen²⁵, the previously hard-line secular nature of Turkish modernization was a barrier towards the implementation of any so-called Turkish model in the Muslim Middle Eastern societies. Only in the last decade, under the AKP rule, a truly 'attractive Turkish model' emerged as the political Islamists took control in a previously 'assertive secularist' state and avoided implementing a radical Islamist structure from above via exercising Sharia law to forcefully change the society. Thus the coexistence of political Islam and a democratic secular system is what constitutes the so-called 'Turkish model' and makes it a promising guide for the emerging democracies as Egypt and Tunisia which currently face a situation where they are trying to build post-authoritarian democratic regimes with political Islam about to grasp power. Clearly Turkish model has two key aspects highly relevant to the problems of these countries, namely, the re-organization of state-religion relations and also the role of military within the post-authoritarian system and its impact on the democratization process²⁶.

23 See Burhanettin Duran and NuhYilmaz, 'Whose model? Which Turkey?'

24 Gonül Tol 'Turkey as an Alternative Democratization Model for the Middle East', 13 February 2011, *Today's Zaman* [Online]. Available at: http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=235474 (Accessed: 16 May 2012).

25 Sinan Ulgen, 'From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East', December 2011, *The Carnegie Papers*, Carnegie Europe, p. 5.

26 Ömer Taspınar, 'The Turkish Model and Its Applicability', in *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy From a Transatlantic Perspective*, Mediteranean Paper Series, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2011, p. 12.

In these countries, a framework to design state-religion relations is much needed, however in addition to this issue; the Turkish model covers other crucial issues such as economic re-organization, integration into world economy and democracy building. In this context, the Turkish model offers important insights to these countries as Turkey had already experienced similar problems and produced valuable solutions to some of them. If we are to make an accurate description of the Turkish model, all these aspects should be taken into account.

The Rise of the Turkish Model and Its Applicability for the Post-Revolutionary Middle East

The current debate on the Turkish model of modernization is not entirely a new topic as it had its precedents in the 20th century. Especially after the 1930s, the radical Kemalist modernization of the new Turkish Republic had attracted interest mainly from developing Muslim countries such as Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq²⁷. However, no Middle Eastern country had totally adopted the Turkish model due to its radical understanding of modernization in terms of ‘social Westernization’ which led the early Republican leaders to adopt a hard-line and assertive secular approach to ‘eradicate’ all manifestations of religion from public space. The Kemalist modernization model was clearly threatening to the dominant traditional ruling classes in the Middle East and their strong resistance has prevented its full adoption despite the interest it arose particularly among the Western-educated Arab elites²⁸. Kirişçi²⁹ points that Turkey had been offered as a model two other times in recent years, first in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union as an inspiration to the newly independent Turkic and Muslim countries in Caucasia and Central Asia and secondly with President Bush’s ‘Broader MENA Initiative’ in the 2000s. In its earlier manifestations, the Turkish model inspired some reforms in several countries, most significantly in Pahlavi Iran and Afghanistan in the 1930s and Azerbaijan after 1991³⁰. However the difference between the earlier manifestations of the Turkish model and the current discourse is that, now the

27 See Meliha Benli Altunisik, ‘The Possibilities and Limits of Turkey’s Soft Power in the Middle East’ and Sinan Ulgen, ‘From Inspiration to Aspiration: Turkey in the New Middle East’, p. 4.

28 Kemal Kirisci, ‘Turkey’s “Demonstrative Effect” and the Transformation of the Middle East’.

29 *Ibid*, p. 34-35.

30 See Celal Metin *Emperyalist Çağda Modernleşme; Türk Modernleşmesive İran (1800-1941)* [Modernization in the Age of Imperialism; Turkish Modernization and Iran], Ankara: Phoenix Yayınevi, 2011.

potential key political actors within the Middle East countries such as the Islamist movements indicate that they see Turkey as a model. In the previous examples, Turkey was presented as a model or inspiration by foreign actors such as the USA or weaker local actors like the Westernized elites who lacked public support. Also the reform programmes inspired by the Turkish model remained very limited in the aforementioned countries. This time, however, there is a strong chance for a much more complete application of the Turkish model as influential actors seems to be on the way to adopting it. Furthermore, the current Turkish model is much more applicable due to its specific characteristics which will be analyzed in this section.

In order to assess the sudden appeal of the Turkish model for the Middle Eastern societies, the reasons behind the recent uprisings must be correctly identified as the Turkish model has become popular mainly after the Arab Spring as a guide to the emergent democracies. It has been argued that the Arab Spring has been caused by the inability of the authoritarian regimes to achieve 'good governance' and the political and economic stagnation that had been going on for decades³¹. Foreign dependence and corruption have also been among the most referred reasons for the revolution³². Unemployment, poverty and the dedication of the elite to preserve the *status quo* fuelled the frustration of educated young masses and led to the revolution³³. The deficits of the authoritarian regimes, namely the lack of sustainable economic growth, inability to handle the rapid population growth and a closed bureaucratic and nepotistic state structure ruled by a small elite which have suppressed all demands for reforms and led to the emergence of a totally 'unaccountable government' are the main issues that the Turkish model can be expected to solve. This is a reasonable expectation as Turkey has achieved rapid economic growth and undergone a process of democratization which has altogether changed the traditional power balance between the elected government and the formerly influential military/civilian bureaucracy.

In addition to the internal problems of these societies, another major factor contributing to the appeal of the Turkish model is the increas-

31 Alper Y. Dede (2011) p. 23.

32 Saim Kayasibi and Mehmet Birekul) 'Turkish Democracy: A Model for the Arab World', *Journal of Islam in Asia*, Special Issue, No.3, September 2011, p.256.

33 Alper Y. Dede, 'The Arab Uprisings: Debating the "Turkish Model"', p. 23-24.

ing popularity of Turkey in the Middle East, mainly achieved by the AKP administration's new pro-active foreign policy towards the region, particularly its anti-Israeli position in the Arab-Israeli conflict which has caught the attention of the so-called 'Arab Street'³⁴. It must be noted that Turkey's image has only recently become positive in the Middle East which has led to the emergence of the 'Turkish model' as previously, Turkey was generally perceived negatively due to its hard-line secularism and global position at the side of the Western world due to its membership in NATO, strong ties with the US and most of all, its military alliance with Israel in the late 1990s³⁵. It has been argued that Turkey's recent positive image is due to a radical change in Turkey's 'self-identity'³⁶. Since the 1980s, Turkey has gradually moved towards accepting its 'Muslim identity', a process that has reached its peak in the AKP rule since 2002. In this regard, the Prime Minister Erdogan's continuous critique of Israel has enhanced Turkey's image in the Middle East, contributing to the popularity of the Turkish model³⁷. Particularly Turkey's increasingly strong ties with anti-Israeli organizations such as Hamas contributed to Turkey's positive image in the Arab countries which has risen to unprecedented levels over the years as Erdogan's prestige rapidly grew³⁸.

Particularly for the Egyptian people, Turkey's independent foreign policy direction under the AKP government must be inspiring as Erdogan has openly criticized Israel in every platform and condemned Israeli actions such as the 2006 attack on Lebanon while the Mubarak administration remained silent. It is hardly a secret that in light of the public opinion towards Israel and the USA in most Arab countries and also in Egypt, a democratically elected government responsible for its people would not be easily swayed by the US or any other foreign power in its foreign policy actions³⁹.

34 Kemal Kirisci, 'Turkey's "Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East', p. 43.

35 Paul Salem, 'Turkey's Image in the Arab World', TESEV Foreign Policy Programme, 2011, p. 1.

36 Ömer Taspınar, 'The Turkish Model and Its Applicability', p. 9.

37 See Murat Aktas 'Can Turkey be a Role Model for the Muslim Countries', *2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR Vol. 17*, 2011, p. 167 and Hasan Nafaa (2011) p. 43.

38 Kemal Kirisci, 'Turkey's "Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East', p. 43.

39 See Shibley Telhami-Brookings Institute (2011) 'The 2011 Arab Public Opinion Poll', November [Online] Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/reports/2011/11/21-arab-public-opinion-telhami> (Accessed: 15 May 2012).

The rise of the Turkish model in the region is mainly due to the public interest shown by the people. Kirişçi puts emphasis on the notion 'demonstrative effect', a term borrowed from Huntington in explaining the emergence of the Turkish model⁴⁰. After all, in order to be able to discuss the application of the 'Turkish model' to the region, there must be genuine demands from the actors within these societies. The recent surveys like the crucial TESEV poll clearly demonstrates that there is strong interest and demand from the Arab public for a 'Turkish model' as these societies show a high level of consciousness about the 'demonstrative effect'⁴¹. The poll produced a striking result as 66 percent of respondents in the Arab world believe that Turkey can be a 'model' for Middle Eastern countries⁴². Furthermore, the leader of the Nahda Party in Tunisia, Rachid Ghannouchi explicitly told the press that his party will follow the footsteps of the AKP and take Turkey as their model⁴³.

A key factor in the appeal of the Turkish model is its economic success. Salem⁴⁴ points that most of the respondents to polls in Arab countries have identified 'economy' as the main problem of their countries. It is important to note that Turkey is the only Muslim country in the region that has managed to create a self-sustainable and free-market economy that is not based on natural reserves like gas or oil as in the *rentier* economies like Saudi Arabia and Iran but on modern production sectors such as automotive, textiles and white goods. The Turkish experience clearly shows that there is a strong link between the economic development and democratization. As indicated by Kirişçi, the most important factor in this connection is the emergence of a large middle class which would eventually be the 'backbone' of democracy by resisting the oligarchic rule of elites due to their economic interests and at the same time, providing the funds necessary for the development of a strong civil society, thus empowering the democracy in many ways⁴⁵.

40 Kemal Kirisci , 'Turkey's "Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East', p. 35-36.

41 Mensur Akgun, Sabiha Senyuçel Gundogar, Gokce Percinoglu and Jonathan Levack 'The Perception of Turkey in the Middle East 2010', *TESEV Foreign Policy Programme*, TESEV Publications, 2011.

42 Paul Salem (2011) p. 6.

43 See Dietrich Jung, "'After the Spring": Is Turkey a Model for Arab States", p. 2. and *Hurriyet Daily News*, "Ennahda takes Turkey as model for democracy," [Online] Available at: <http://www.hurriyetdaily-news.com/n.php?n=ennahda-takes-turkey-as-model-for-democracy-democracy-2011-10-27> (Accessed: 5 November 2011).

44 Paul Salem , 'Turkey's Image in the Arab World', *TESEV Foreign Policy Programme*, 2011, p. 4.

45 Kemal Kirisci 'Turkey's "Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East', p. 37.

One of the most important aspects of the Turkish model is that it is the modernization experience of a 'developing' country unlike the Western European or American models. As pointed by many scholars, the Turkish modernization is still an ongoing 'work in progress' as the country still struggles to handle many problems of the process⁴⁶. There is a wide 'development' gap between the Middle Eastern societies and the Western world which makes their models more difficult to emulate as the modernization process for the Western European and Northern American countries are long completed. Turkey relatively lags behind these countries which ironically makes it more suitable for the environment of the Middle Eastern countries. Kirişçi⁴⁷ emphasizes the relative 'un-development' of Turkish democracy in comparison to the more advanced examples in Europe as a factor increasing its appeal to the Arab societies as observers from the region can actually see how the transformation is happening and how Turkey deals with the problems it encounters along the way.

Another factor strengthening the appeal of the Turkish model *vis-a-vis* the Western models is the cultural affinity between Turkish and Arab societies, apparent particularly in sharing the same religion. Turkey and the Arab countries have been part of the Ottoman Empire for centuries which have shaped their cultures and brought them closer despite the fact that the Ottoman legacy is often perceived in negative terms by the Arab societies. Even though Turkey has an imperial past in the region and the debates over the Turkish model has sparked heated discussions about whether the Ottoman Empire is being re-built again or not, still Turkey is a fellow Muslim country and both the Arab elites and the public can more easily empathize with Turkish society rather than Western democracies⁴⁸. The appeal of the Turkish model has also been attributed to the 'reluctance' of the Turkish government to consciously attempt to export its political, social and economic system to the Mid-

46 Seymen Atasoy, 'The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?', p. 86.

47 Kemal Kirişçi, 'Turkey's "Demonstrative Effect" and the Transformation of the Middle East', p. 40.

48 See Ömer Taşpınar, 'Turkey's Middle East Policies: Between Neo-Ottomanism and Kemalism', *Carnegie Paper*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2008 and *Today's Zaman*, 'I am not a neo-Ottoman, Davutoglu says', 25 November 2009 [Online] Available at:<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-193944-i-am-not-a-neo-ottoman-davutoglu-says.html> (Accessed: 7 May 2012) and Sedef Arat-Koc, "Neo-Empire, Middle Power or Subcontractor for Imperialism? 'Neo-Ottomanism', Shifts in Geopolitics and Turkey's Foreign Policy", BRISMES Annual Conference 2012 - Revolution and Revolt: Understanding the forms and causes of change, 26-28 March 2012, London School of Economics and Political Science.

dle East while the Western world explicitly desire to do so which was most evident in the US attempts to export 'democracy' to the region through the Broader MENA Initiative⁴⁹. Any attempt to export foreign values meet criticism in the region due to the specific Arab sensitivity to imperialism which can be seen as a 'wound' in the Arab psyche caused by the Middle Eastern history of colonialism. The emergence of the Turkish model also indicates a clear sign of failure for the appeal of the Iranian model of Islamist revolution and radical version of 'theocratic state' as the Turkish model of 'democratic Islamism', is becoming the norm in the region⁵⁰.

It has been argued that the Arab Spring heralds the dawn of a 'new era' in the political discourse of the region as the young generation that have led the revolutions have no interest in ideological goals like building an Islamic state but have pragmatic demands such as to have high living standards, accountable and efficient governance⁵¹. Furthermore it can be said that the radical Islamic experiments in Iran and Afghanistan led to disillusionment from theocratic state while the Turkish model stands in stark contrast with its inspiring messages of prosperity, independence, compatibility of democracy with Islam and national self-confidence. It is important to note that the Islamist parties in the region like Nahda and Justice and Freedom Party have been willing to voice their support for the Turkish model to improve their reputation abroad and alleviate the fears of secular liberals at home⁵². The approach of Islamist movements towards the Turkish model reveals the 'pragmatism' of the local political actors. The local Islamists noticed that democratic Turkey has achieved economic and diplomatic successes while the theocratic Islamic regimes like Iran and Taliban in Afghanistan have become isolated 'rogue states' in the global system and failed to solve the development problems in their countries⁵³.

Conclusion

This paper had two main objectives, firstly to present a clear and balanced understanding of the so-called Turkish model by pointing to the flaws of the two main interpretations and offering a new framework to analyze the topic and secondly, to account for the sudden rise of the

49 Seymen Atasoy 'The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?', p. 86.

50 Alper Y. Dede, "The Arab Uprisings: Debating the "Turkish Model"", p. 25.

51 Gönül Tol, 'Turkey as an Alternative Democratization Model for the Middle East'.

52 Dietrich Jung, "After the Spring": Is Turkey a Model for Arab States", p. 3.

53 Seymen Atasoy, 'The Turkish Example: A Model for Change in the Middle East?', p. 87.

Turkish model in the post-revolutionary environment of the Middle East and analyze why the Turkish modernization experience is important for the region and much more applicable than the Western modernization or the Iranian model of theocratic state. It has been argued that in light of the demands and needs of the Arab revolutionaries who helped overthrow the authoritarian regimes and still supervise the political situation from the streets, the Turkish model offers valuable lessons in terms of transition to market economy, integration into the global market, rapid economic growth to overtake the population growth and reduce unemployment, efficient governance and accountable government and maybe most importantly the re-organization of the relations between political Islam, secular parties and citizens and the military in the post-revolutionary atmosphere. This paper does not attempt to claim that Turkey is a 'perfect model' free from problems in terms of its democracy and human rights. On the contrary, the paper suggests that the ongoing problems in these issues and the relative underdevelopment of the country and the numerous mistakes that have been made within its modernization experience make it a 'truly applicable model' for the Middle East as they have the chance to observe the economic and political developments in Turkey and benefit from its achievements especially in terms of economic development and learn from its mistakes and strive to avoid them in terms of political development.

There are still many aspects of the topic that needs further research. In order to assess to what extent the Turkish model can be applied to the post-revolutionary Middle Eastern countries, the characteristics of the Turkish modernization and the long processes that gave rise to it must be analyzed in detail and compared with the diverse conditions of each Middle Eastern society individually on a case by case basis since it can be clearly seen that the post-revolutionary countries like Tunisia, Libya and Egypt show different characteristics. Also the time has come to undertake a more detailed analysis on the application of the Turkish model regarding the methods and areas to actually show how the Turkish modernization can be utilized to achieve socio-economic and political development. Particularly two issues demand immediate attention, namely, the Turkish success in managing the delicate balance between Islam and the secular-democratic state and the re-organization of the Turkish economy starting from the 1980s which has enabled the country to achieve the rapid economic growth of the last decade. These are two issues that the new regimes in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt currently face and a well-presented analysis of Turkish experience in these issues may help these societies handle these complex problems.

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